

EQUALITY ANALYSIS (EA)

POLICY/PROPOSAL:	Digital Strategy Refresh 2022 – 2026
DEPARTMENT:	Customer and Digital Services
TEAM:	Digital Transformation Team
LEAD OFFICER:	Ibrahim Fahiyeh
DATE:	12.10.21

NB: Please ensure you have read the accompanying EA guidance and instructions in full.

SECTION A – INITIAL SCREENING

1. Please provide a description of the policy, proposal, change or initiative, and a summary its objectives and the intended results.

The Covid19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of digital technology in the way we live and work, and has accelerated the move to online for many more citizens, businesses and organisations. At the same time it has exposed greater inequalities, including digital exclusion, and increased the risk that those who do not have access to digital devices, fast broadband and sufficient data are left even further behind. For this reason, we have refreshed our digital strategy to refocus our priorities as we emerge from the pandemic and better prepare us for the future.

Our Digital Strategy Themes are:

- **Access** – Improving access to information and resident’s services. Making sure that council systems are easy to use for all residents
- **Digital Place** - Having consistent technology and connectivity available to enable Brent to be a digital borough that is accessible for both businesses and residents. This includes improved access to public Wi-Fi for residents
- **Digital Inclusion** – Identifying digitally excluded residents and providing access to devices and digital skills to enable all residents across Brent to participate safely in the digital world
- **Data and Smart devices** - Using our data to better understand our customers and improve the way we deliver services by making quick and robust decisions for residents
- **Digital Workplace** - Ensuring staff have access to technology that will enable them to work efficiently and to have the digital skills to effectively use existing and new technology

To support this sustained programme of change, delivery of this digital strategy is underpinned by the following key principles:

1. We will ensure that our services are accessible to everyone. We will develop guidance on digital inclusion setting out the accessibility standards new technology needs to comply with and to help services plan the provision for vulnerable customers as access arrangements change.
2. Services will be people centred. We will work with residents, partners and businesses to co-design and co-deliver transformation, ensuring that Brent’s evolution as a digital borough is shaped by the energy, ideas and requirements of local people and key stakeholders.
3. We will embed our digital vision within our policies and strategies including HR, Planning, Regeneration, Employment and Skills and ICT. We will also reflect it in our engagement with the community and models of working with the Community and Voluntary Sector.
4. We will deliver robust information security measures to protect resident and stakeholder data from misuse and cyber threats, and we will safeguard their privacy

though increasingly secure and modern information governance and data sharing arrangements both internally and with partners.

5. We will invest in our workforce to ensure they have the resources and agile skills they need to innovate, collaborate and excel in the digital workplace and work smarter. This will include imbedding a culture of change across the organisation, moving away from a traditional 'service and department' approach to working in flexible, multi-disciplinary teams that use methodology aligned with the Local Government Digital Service Standard to iterate continuous service improvements in response to user needs.
6. We will work openly and actively collaborate with other organisations, including with the Community and Voluntary Sector, to develop innovative solutions and share learning and good practice.

2. Who may be affected by this policy or proposal?

The digital strategy will have a positive impact on the majority of Brent residents as the strategy seeks to improve the ease with which residents can access council services and to improve the digital skills of Brent residents. The programme is designed to increase digital inclusion and ensure all groups have the both the infrastructure and the skills to access the internet and digital services.

Some service users, mostly older people and disabled people, may not benefit as much from digital services as they are less likely to have access to the internet. This could be due to lack of digital skills, access costs being too high, or, complex needs which makes it difficult for them to access the internet. The digital programme seeks to increase digital inclusion and ensure that groups who need more support to access digital services get the help they need. It does also not take away services from any group. Strengthening our digital services will not disadvantage those who struggle to use them as conventional communication channels will still be available and more council officer capacity will be freed up to support those who need it most.

Additionally, residents with English as a second language and residents in lower social economic groups are less likely to be online. The programme supports these groups to access the internet and increase their digital skills.

To reduce any risk of bias in our work to use data more effectively to help to improve services, Brent has established a data ethics board to ensure that we are ethically and responsibly using data for our residents

3. Is there relevance to equality and the council's public sector equality duty? Please explain why. If your answer is no, you must still provide an explanation.

Yes, when developing the digital strategy due regard has been given to minimise the disadvantages connected to particular protected characteristics. Digital inclusion is a key

dirver for the digital programme. Particular consideration has also been given to ensuring accessibility standards are met for all technology solutions.

4. Please indicate with an “X” the potential impact of the policy or proposal on groups with each protected characteristic. Carefully consider if the proposal will impact on people in different ways as a result of their characteristics.

Characteristic	Impact Positive	Impact Neutral/None	Impact Negative
Age	X		
Sex	X		
Race	X		
Disability *	X		
Sexual orientation	X		
Gender reassignment	X		
Religion or belief	X		
Pregnancy or maternity	X		
Marriage	X		

5. Please complete **each row** of the checklist with an “X”.

Screening Checklist

	YES	NO
Have you established that the policy or proposal <i>is</i> relevant to the council’s public sector equality duty?	X	
Does the policy or proposal relate to an area with known inequalities?	X	
Would the policy or proposal change or remove services used by vulnerable groups of people?	X	
Has the potential for negative or positive equality impacts been identified with this policy or proposal?	X	

If you have answered YES to ANY of the above, then proceed to section B.

If you have answered NO to ALL of the above, then proceed straight to section D.

SECTION B – IMPACTS ANALYSIS

1. Outline what information and evidence have you gathered and considered for this analysis. If there is little, then explain your judgements in detail and your plans to validate them with evidence. If you have monitoring information available, include it here.

A Citizens Online report, “Digital Inclusion in Brent” provides analysis of residents’ digital skills and access to the internet to determine those most likely to be at risk from Digital exclusion in Brent (please see Appendix 1 for some of the report’s findings). A series of recommendations were made to support and mitigate risks for vulnerable residents which have been used to inform our digital programme.

A considerable amount of engagement with residents has already taken place as part of the digital programme and this will be used to help improve digital inclusion in the borough and ensure that different groups are supported. For example, as part of the work to improve the website, surveys and interviews took place with different residents and this has provided insight into how different groups use services and the improvements they need. We have also worked with the voluntary and community sector to understand the needs of the people they support.

The Equality Profile of Brent 2021 provides an equality profile of the Brent population according to the nine protected characteristics named in the Equality Act 2010.

In 2018 the Brent Resident Attitudes Survey (RAS) was undertaken, this comprised face to face interviews with 2,113 residents. The sample was designed to be representative of the borough’s population and is large enough to provide an analysis of digital use by demographic and socio-economic group.

The survey included several questions relevant to the topic of digital inclusion, these included:

- Internet access (frequency/mode);
- Current use of online methods to access services and information;
- Views about likely future use (among non-users).

Based on responses, the RAS estimates that around 9 out of 10 Brent residents (89%) use the internet. The majority of Brent residents use it for more than 2 hours a day. A significant minority - just over 1 in 10 of those surveyed – said they did not use the internet (11%).

The Brent RAS estimate on internet use is broadly in line with Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey estimates, which indicate that around 90% of Brent adults were internet users (as at 2016). The RAS estimates are likely to be more reliable as they are based on a larger sample for Brent (x3). Also, RAS provides a richer data on demographics.

The RAS estimates that the majority of internet users in Brent access it via a smart phone (85% of users).

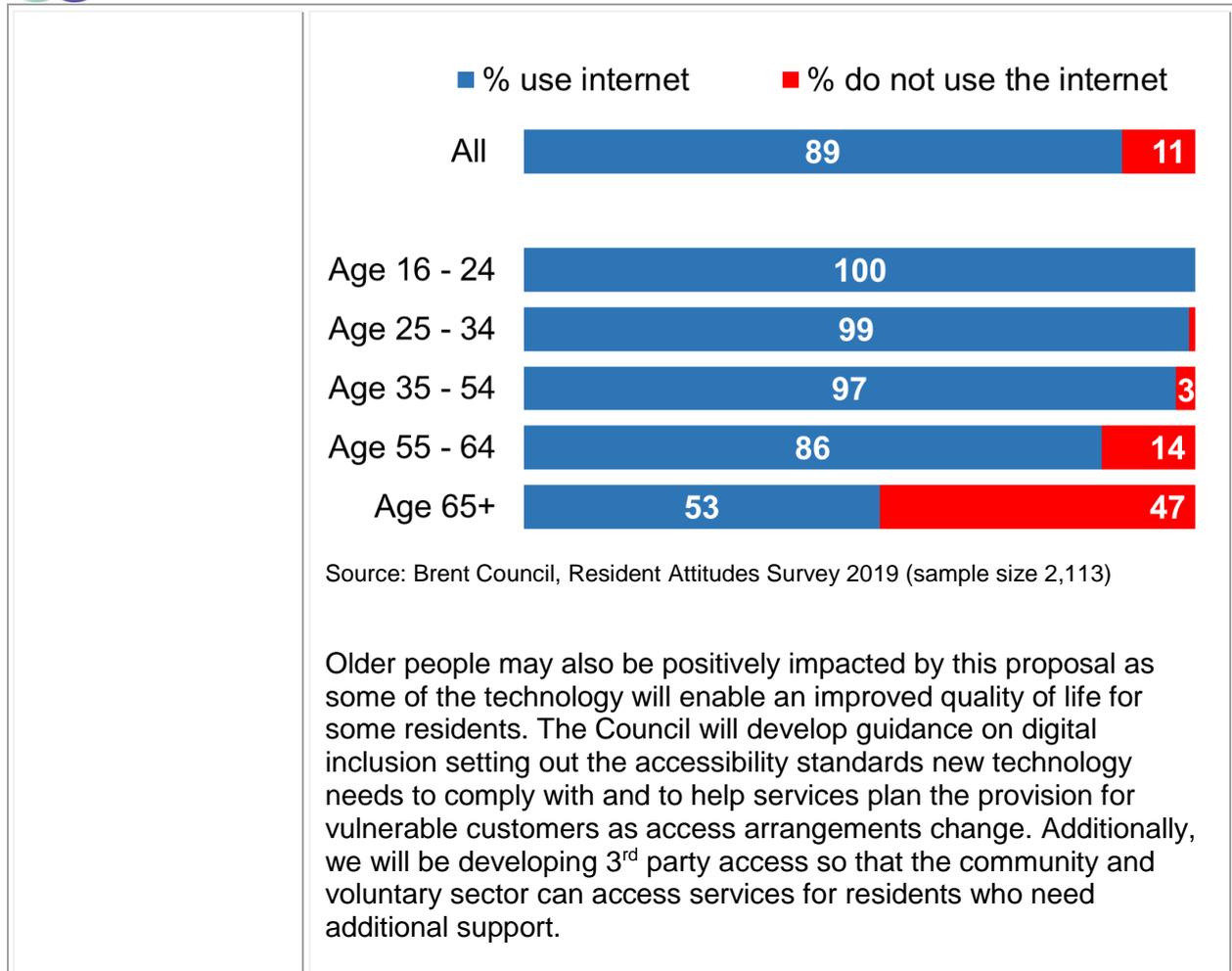
A further RAS is due to be undertaken soon and the findings of this survey will be used to further target and develop digital solutions and work to address digital exclusion.

2. For each “protected characteristic” provide details of all the potential or known impacts identified, both positive and negative, and explain how you have reached these

conclusions based on the information and evidence listed above. Where appropriate state “not applicable”.

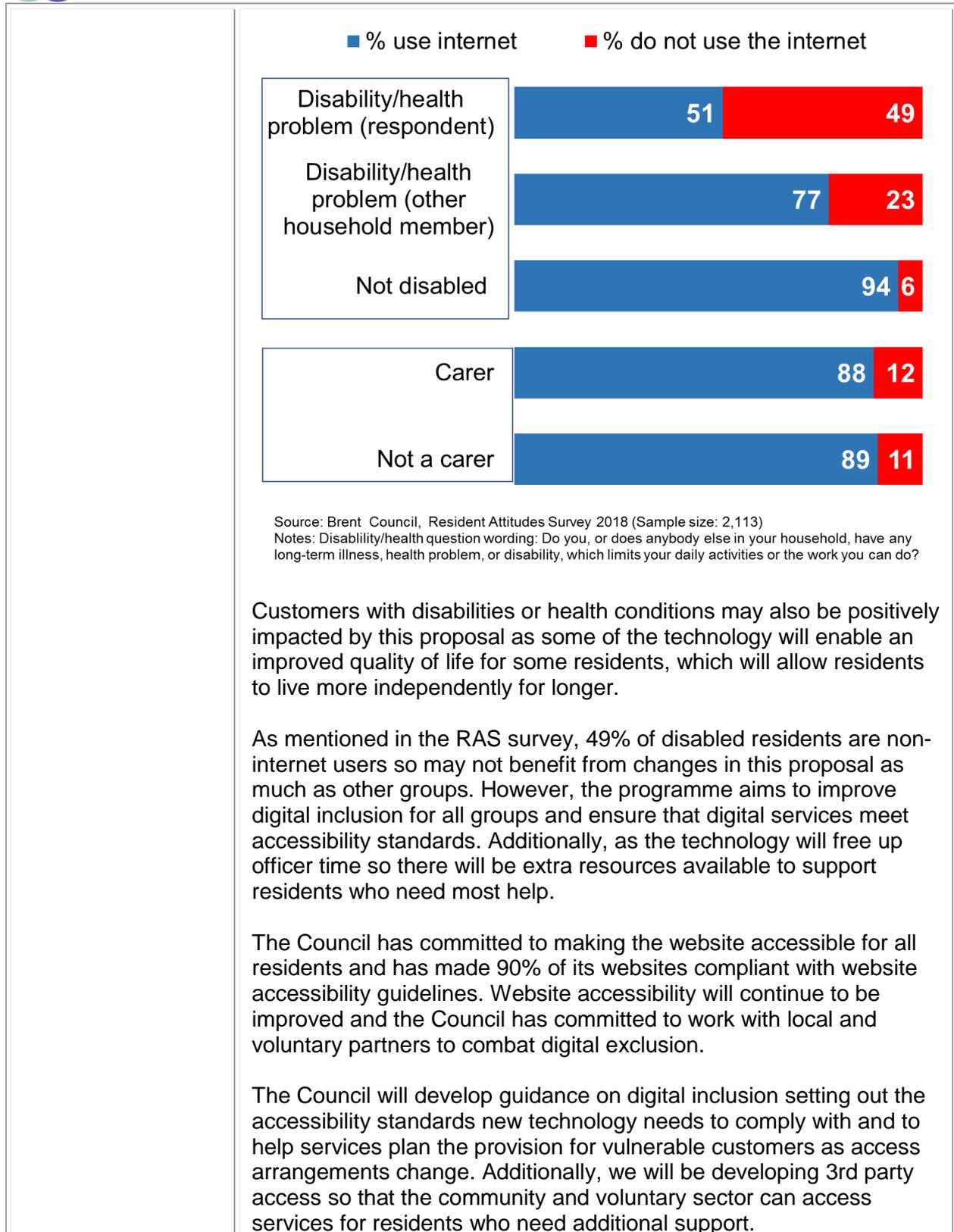
AGE

<p>Details of impacts identified</p>	<p>In 2020, the median age of Brent population was 36 – four years lower than the national average. The population is expected to age in the future: the number of residents aged 65 and over is expected to increase 78% between 2020 and 2040 – an increase of 33,000 older residents (Equality Profile of Brent 2021)</p> <p>According to the Digital inclusion in Brent 2020 report, it is estimated that 6.8% (17,600) of the population of Brent do not use the internet. The data also shows that 75% (13,241) of the non-internet users are over the age of 65. This means that older residents are more likely to require extra support to access online services so may not benefit from changes in this proposal as much as other age groups. However, this proposal aims to add additional services so there will be no loss of existing services. Also, the technology will free up officer time so there will be extra resources available to support residents. The programme will also increase digital inclusion by increasing connectivity in the borough and the digital skills of residents. Digital Champions will be on hand to support those who need extra help.</p> <p>Brent staff members will have to adapt to using new technologies which may be more challenging for some older colleagues. The Council has invested and partnered with Microsoft to offer over 20,000 hours of digital training for staff across the council, supporting new skills for improved services. There are existing support systems available for colleagues who will need more help in adapting to the change and there will be additional learning and development available to support and up skill officers.</p> <p>The Brent RAS estimates that internet use is strongly related to age, which is consistent with national studies: whilst almost all young adults in Brent use the internet, just 53% of the over 65s use the internet.</p>
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DISABILITY

<p>Details of impacts identified</p>	<p>Around one in seven Brent residents have a long-term health problem or disability that limits their day-to-day-activities in some way. The prevalence of disability rises sharply with age: more than half of all residents aged 65 and over had a long-term health problem or disability (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).</p> <p>The Brent RAS estimates that internet access is strongly related to disability/poor health (49% of residents with disability/health problem are not accessing the internet). This is likely to be related to the findings on age as prevalence of disability and poor health rises with age. These may include but are not limited to residents with learning disabilities, mental health conditions or severe physical disabilities or health conditions, as well as customers with hearing impairments (incl. BSL users) and/or visual impairments.</p> <p>The Brent RAS estimates that carers are as likely as non-carers to use the internet.</p>
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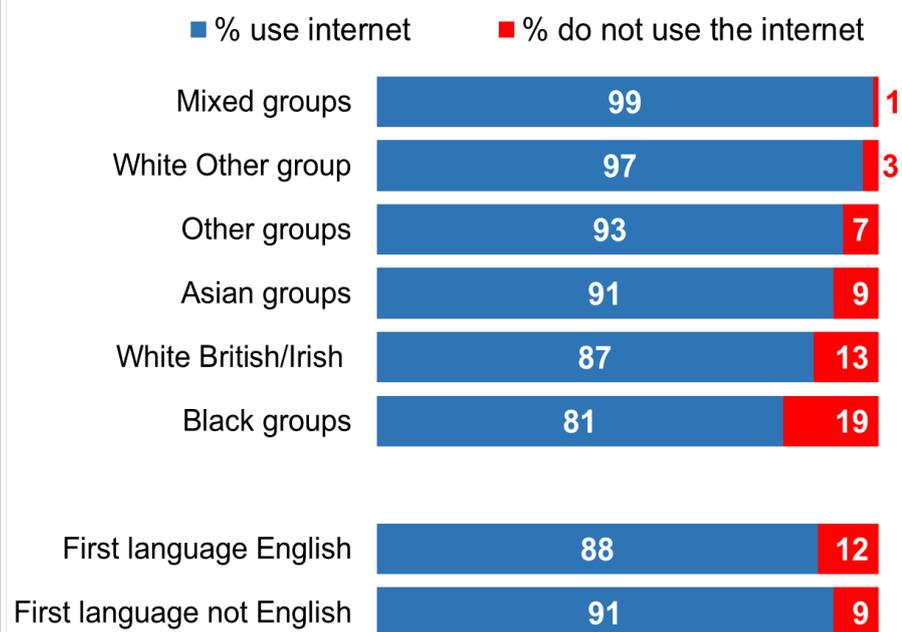
RACE

Details of impacts identified	Almost two thirds (64%) of the Brent population are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).
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BAME customers who do not have English as their first language may face access barriers or be unable to self-serve without alternative languages being available for translation. However, the council is able to arrange translation or interpreting services and/or alternative formats on request through its corporate translation and interpretation contract.

The Brent RAS estimates that internet use levels are highest for residents from mixed ethnic groups and lowest for black residents and that first language has little bearing on internet usage.

The Digital Programme will help increase digital inclusion for all Brent residents, including those from a BAME background.



Source: Brent Council, Resident Attitudes Survey 2018 (Sample size: 2,113)

Dollis Hill, Harlesden and Stonebridge wards have the highest levels of digital exclusion in the borough of Brent according to the Citizens Online report and have high levels of ethnic diversity. Please see figure 1 below for illustration of digital exclusion and connective on map. According to the ONS 2011 census, on average the demographic of the population in the 3 wards is made up of 69% BAME residents. This means residents from these areas are less likely to be able to access new online services. However, this proposal will likely have a positive effect on residents as the digital strategy looks to reduce inequality in the following ways:

- In Harlesden, work is being done with Community Fibre to increase connectivity for local businesses through targeted engagement and SME business specific contracts. Work is also being done with Open reach to increase connectivity across NW10 to improve connectivity for residents across our most digitally excluded wards as mentioned above.

- The residents support fund will provide additional support to disadvantaged residents who may not have IT equipment to be able to access online services.
- Over 2000 residents will have access to classroom based digital skills training through Brent Start.
- There will be over 20,000 hours' worth of self-study digital skills training to all residents.
- There will be 500 trained digital champions across Brent to support residents in developing their digital skills.

Digital connectivity and exclusion maps:

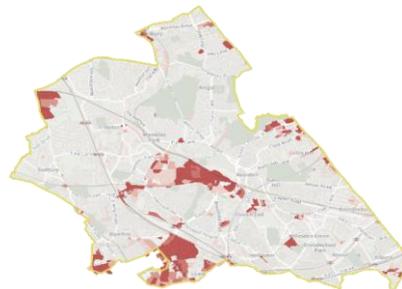


Figure 1: GLA connectivity map of Brent

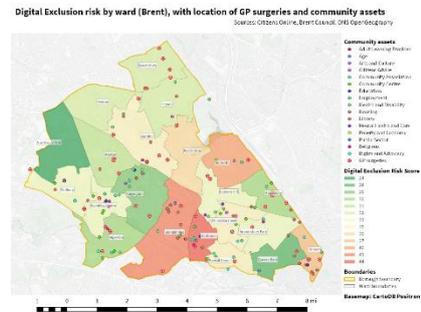


Figure 2: Digital exclusion risk by ward

*The areas shaded in red show low levels of digital connectivity in figure 1 and the areas shaded in red and orange show a higher risk of digital exclusion in figure 2.

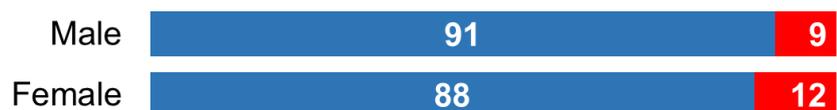
SEX

Details of impacts identified

The gender split in Brent population is 51% male and 49% female (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).

The Digital Strategy aims to provide assistance and support to all client groups, including people of all sexes.

The Brent RAS estimates that internet user rates in Brent are similar for men and women.



Source: Brent Council, Resident Attitudes Survey 2018 (Sample size: 2,113)

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Details of impacts identified	<p>Approximately 7.4% of Brent residents identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).</p> <p>The Digital Strategy aims to provide assistance and support to all client groups, including people of any sexual orientation.</p>
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PREGANCY AND MATERNITY

Details of impacts identified	<p>Brent has relatively high birth rates. In 2019, there were 4,919 live births in Brent – which equates to 72.6 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).</p> <p>The Digital Strategy aims to provide assistance and support to all client groups, including people affected by pregnancy and maternity.</p>
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RELIGION OR BELIEF

Details of impacts identified	<p>82% of Brent residents identify as having a religion or belief (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).</p> <p>The Digital Strategy aims to provide assistance and support to all client groups, including people of all religions or beliefs.</p>
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GENDER REASSIGNMENT

Details of impacts identified	<p>The Government Equalities Office tentatively estimates that around 0.3-0.8% of the UK population are transgender. In Brent this would equate to between 1000 and 2600 people (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).</p> <p>The Digital Strategy aims to provide assistance and support to all client groups, including people who have undergone gender reassignment.</p>
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MARRIAGE & CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

Details of impacts identified	<p>The 2011 Census found that around 43% of Brent residents were married and 0.3% were in a civil partnership. In 2017, 902 marriages or civil partnerships took place in Brent – of these, 23 (2.5%) were same sex marriages or civil partnerships (Equality Profile of Brent 2021).</p> <p>The Digital Strategy aims to provide assistance and support to all client groups, including people of all partnership arrangements.</p>
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<p>3. Could any of the impacts you have identified be unlawful under the Equality Act 2010?</p>

No

4. Were the participants in any engagement initiatives representative of the people who will be affected by your proposal and is further engagement required?

The Brent Resident Attitudes Survey (RAS) sample was designed to be representative of the borough population and is large enough to provide an analysis of digital use by demographic and socio-economic group. The survey comprised of face to face interviews with 2,113 residents.

The Citizens online report involved engagement with voluntary and community sector organisations in Brent and local businesses.

Residents were also engaged with specific projects in the Digital Programme, including:

- the CYP pathways application engaged with Brent care leavers
- the website redesign project engaged with local residents
- Digital inclusion action plan involved work and engagement with leaders from the community and voluntary sector

5. Please detail any areas identified as requiring further data or detailed analysis.

See section C

6. If, following your action plan, negative impacts will or may remain, please explain how these can be justified?

There are no remaining negative impacts. Delivery of the Digital Strategy is overseen by the Customer and Digital Board which meets monthly and it will continue to ensure that the impact of the strategy is monitored and any potential negative impacts mitigated.

7. Outline how you will monitor the actual, ongoing impact of the policy or proposal?

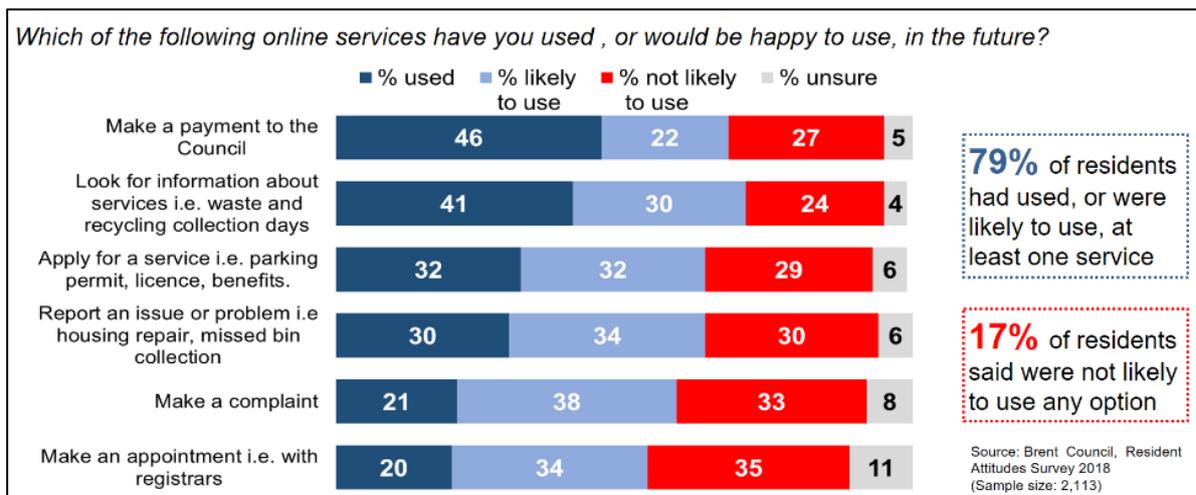
Operational delivery of the Digital Strategy is overseen by the Programme Delivery Board which meets monthly. At a more strategic level, this is then overseen by the Customer and Digital Board which also meets monthly.

SECTION C - CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis above, please detail your overall conclusions. State if any mitigating actions are required to alleviate negative impacts, what these are and what the desired outcomes will be. If positive equality impacts have been identified, consider what actions you

can take to enhance them. If you have decided to justify and continue with the policy despite negative equality impacts, provide your justification. If you are to stop the policy, explain why.

Our approach to online services and support is shaped by knowledge of those more likely to be digitally isolated, but with equal consideration for evidence showing that a majority of residents have already used Brent’s online services, or say they are likely to use them in future (see below chart, Brent RAS). By developing online offers that make the lives of most residents easier - such as enabling them to do things more efficiently or ‘on the go’– we are helping to make online residents’ first choice for interacting with the council, thereby releasing capacity in traditional channels that can be prioritised for residents who need additional support.



The Strategy recognises that a significant minority of Brent residents (1 in 10) are digitally excluded and its intention is to increase digital inclusion and support these residents.

1. The Digital Strategy promotes inclusion, provides opportunities for more residents to gain digital skills and aims to improve the customer experience. Access to support for improved digital skills will be available to Brent residents and council officers, this will include:
 - Digital champions to support residents to improve their digital skills
 - Digital skills courses for residents
 - A business support fund to help businesses with their digital skills and online presence
 - Eight digital skills apprentices to demonstrate our commitment to encouraging digital employment opportunities in Brent
 - Digital skills training for all staff, including Digital Accessibility fundamental training, to support a culture of life-long digital learning within the workforce and when working with residents
2. The Community Hub Model has been designed to provide support for residents with complex needs who may find it challenging to access services. The hub approach aims to engage a wide range of residents in an accessible and inclusive environment and provide support to get them online.

There are currently six community hubs operating in Harlesden, South Kilburn Willesden, Wembley, Kingsbury and The Living Room, based on St Raphael's estate.

Digital support is a key element of the community hub core offer, the hub network aims to ensure positive outcomes for older people and disabled people who may require digital support to participate online.

3. Alongside the Digital Strategy, the Council is undertaking a Customer Access Review which aims to ensure that customers have the access, confidence and skills to engage with the Council digitally. One of the priorities of the review is to ensure services are automated at every opportunity so that resources can be prioritised to support customers who need additional assistance.

As part of the review, front line staff in contact centres, the customer service centre, community hubs and libraries will be trained to:

- Identify characteristics and situations which indicate complex needs with empowerment to provide additional support including delivery of appointment advocacy and hub referral services
 - Ensure that more customers are 'getting online' through 'assisted digital support' available across all access channels. Consistent services will be provided face to face ranging from light touch support/access to equipment to full support provided through side by side assistance
4. We plan to capture equality data in My Account so that we can identify patterns and intervene at the right time for residents to support them.
 5. We will make full use of our data ethics board. Brent has established a data ethics board whose membership is drawn from external data subject matter experts and internal senior managers. Where the council is embarking on a project which will change the way in which we use data, we use the Open Data Institutes' ethics canvas to describe the impacts of the data use to ensure that we are ethically and responsibly using data for resident benefits. The ethics board reviews each canvas and provides feedback and recommendations on the data use.

There are many positive impacts from the strategy on Brent residents, which include:

- Residents will be able to access more services online at a time and place that is convenient for them, and on a device of their choosing
- Businesses will be able to access services in one place when and where it suits them
- Enable greater access to services for residents who need more support as they can use trusted third parties to help them access their digital services
- Quicker and easier access to information
- Increased digital inclusion; increased digital skills and access to the internet

- More support for residents who need additional support to use online channels

SECTION D – RESULT

Please select one of the following options. Mark with an "X".

A	CONTINUE WITH THE POLICY/PROPOSAL UNCHANGED	X
B	JUSTIFY AND CONTINUE THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	
C	CHANGE / ADJUST THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	
D	STOP OR ABANDON THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	

SECTION E - ACTION PLAN

This will help you monitor the steps you have identified to reduce the negative impacts (or increase the positive); monitor actual or ongoing impacts; plan reviews and any further engagement or analysis required.

Action	Expected outcome	Officer	Completion Date
Where appropriate, user testing will involve older people and people with a disability who are less likely to be online	Better understand the user requirements specific to these groups	Rehana Ramesh, Digital Transformation Lead	Ongoing
Ongoing monitoring of equalities through residents accessing Community Hubs and take-up of digital skills training	Continuous monitoring of the equalities implications of the strategy which will inform insights for implementation	Mohammed Jama, Brent Hubs Manager	Ongoing
All projects that will affect residents or staff will have an individual equality impact assessment. We will proactively capture and gather EIA data from residents.	Improved and updated understanding of the affect of the programme on different groups so we can continue to use evidence based enhancements to the programme.	Rehana Ramesh, Digital Transformation Lead	Ongoing
Additional training to be made available to colleagues who need support to use new technologies.	This will help identify colleagues with lower levels of IT literacy. Support packages can be created to reskill colleagues and should allow for more resources to be available to support residents.	Rehana Ramesh, Digital Transformation Lead	Ongoing

SECTION F – SIGN OFF

Please ensure this section is signed and dated.

OFFICER:	Ibrahim Fahiyeh
REVIEWING OFFICER:	Rehana Ramesh

**HEAD OF SERVICE
/ Operational
Director:**



Sadie East,
Director of Transformation



Appendix 1 – findings from Citizens Online Report August 202, “Digital Inlcusion in Brent”

Adults in Brent: Digital Exclusion Stats:

- 19% have no laptop
- 7% have no internet access at home
- 6% have no foundation digital skills
- 18% don't have essential digital skills for life
- 11% only use a smartphone to go online
- 7% are offline